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ABSTRACT

After brief historical and demographic information on Australia's changing societal patterns, this paper discusses some recent research in South Australia related to the expectations of parents and early childhood teachers concerning the purposes of preschooling and early schooling. A questionnaire, designed for both parents and teachers, was sent to a total of 250 parents and 50 early childhood teachers from metropolitan Adelaide. The questionnaire, translated to Italian and Greek so that main ethnic groups as well as English speakers could participate, was divided into three areas: (1) the most important purposes for sending a child to preschool; (2) the most important skills needed by children for functioning effectively when they are adults; and (3) the most important purposes of preschool in relation to the role of parents. (This paper deals only with areas one and two.) It was hypothesized that parents' expectations would differ from those of early childhood teachers, especially in relation to the relative importance of the above purposes. Contrary to this hypothesis it was found that both parents and teachers rated the purpose of social, emotional, and self development as the most important purposes for sending children to preschool, and that ability to care for environment, ability to use mathematical skills, and ability to use leisure time were ranked by both parents and teachers as the least important skills needed by children for the future. Non-English speaking parents, however, placed a higher priority on preparation for school in terms of skill development than did the rest of the sample. (Author/MP)

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EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE :

IS IT A REASONABLE AND ATTAINABLE GOAL?

Paper for the International Congress
of O.M.E.P. World organisation for
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INTRODUCTION

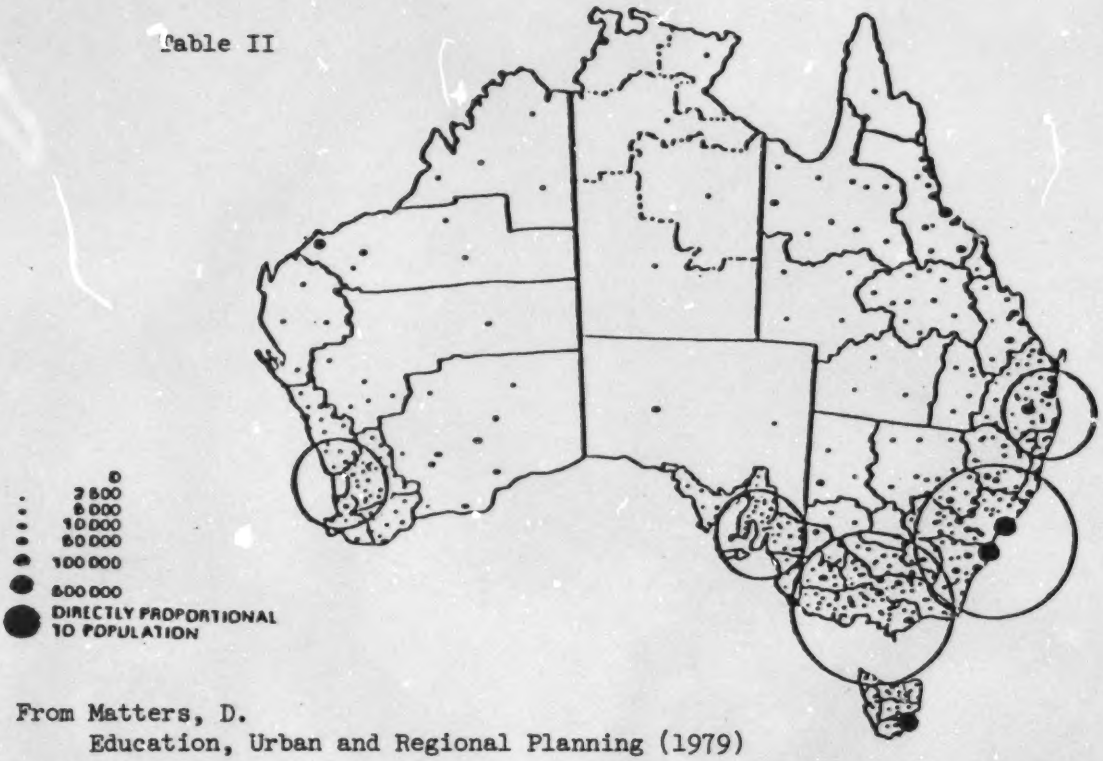
The paper consists of two sections. The first contains some brief historical and demographic information on Australia's changing societal patterns; second, a discussion of some recent research in South Australia related to the expectations of parents and of early childhood teachers concerning the purposes of pre-schooling and early schooling.

PART I BACKGROUND : SOME ASPECTS OF THE AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

Australia is an industrialised as well as an agricultural society. In size it is almost three million square miles, comparable to that of the United States of America and with a population of 14.4 million (1979 figures Australian Bureau of Statistics). The country is divided into seven states and two territories as shown on the map of Australia, Table I.

Table I

Table II



From Matters, D.
Education, Urban and Regional Planning (1979)

Table II shows the distribution of population throughout Australia. It can be seen that the areas with the largest density of population are concentrated on the eastern coastline and particularly in the cities of Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

Unlike other countries of similar size, most of Australia is extremely arid with much of its land desert. Low and often erratic rainfall across most of Australia's hinterland makes farming hazardous. It is, therefore, easy to appreciate why most of Australia's population is clustered around the major cities and rural towns.

In keeping with many of the world's so-called 'developed' countries, Australia's population pattern has changed considerably in the last thirty years. First colonised by white man in 1788, the ensuing years right up until the Second World War saw Australia populated mainly by

immigrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland. It can be appreciated, therefore, why so much of the older Australian way of living mirrored that of Northern Europe. The system of government in Australia which became independent of England in 1901 follows the British Westminster system. Public services, school systems also were modelled along British lines.

The period immediately following the Second World War, that is, during the late 1940's and early 1950's, was one when Australia embarked upon a large-scale migration programme which included Southern European peoples as well as Northern Europeans. Since that time some 2.2 million immigrants have made their home in Australia. In fact it is claimed that Melbourne has the largest population of Greeks in any city of the world outside Greece.

In the 1950's and 1960's the official government policy of helping immigrants settle into Australia according to the Report Education for a Multicultural Society (1979) was a policy of assimilation.

> (1979:6) It was expected that groups coming from different cultures would submerge those elements of their mother culture which differed from the culture of the majority groups, and in time would adopt the majority culture.

Studies of the assimilationist approach during this period showed migrants as inarticulate and politically impotent, their views neither known nor heard. A study by Jupp (1966) highlighted the frustration and suffering on the part of migrants and he claimed that this could have been attenuated by more vigorous, humane and imaginative action on the part of the government. Jupp wrote (1966:12) that for all the apparent influence of Australia's two million migrants they might just as well have not existed.

Whilst in the past, the non-English speaking migrant in Australia might not have had much of a voice in the governing of Australia nor little influence on the patterning of the greater Australian culture, such a situation is quite the opposite today.

There has, for example, been a marked change in educational policies and such change is far reaching in all areas of education. Schools and other educational institutions as a result are being forced to accommodate languages and cultures other than English.

In terms of planned educational curricula during the 1950's and 1960's it has been stated by Martin (1978:28) that the main thrust of the Government's response to the problem of migrants was the organisation of English classes for adults. It was not until the mid-sixties that the educational problems of migrant children became a question for debate. As a result of growing pressure from teachers and community groups special programmes were initiated.

In 1971 the Commonwealth Minister for Immigration stated:

> The earlier desire to make stereotype Australians of the newcomer has been set aside. The use of 'integration' instead of 'assimilation' is not mere semantics, it is an outward sign of a fundamental change in the attitude of the Australian Government and people.

Since that period prior to 1971, the Australian Government has funded multi-cultural education projects and programmes.

It must be recognised however, that in a multi-cultural society such as is Australia, there are many differing views as to what children should gain from pre-schooling and schooling. This subject will be considered later on in this paper.

Population Trends

Population statistics show that the current annual population growth is 1.18% and as such represents the lowest rate of growth since 1930. Statistics show that Australia has an increasingly ageing population. Looking specifically at South Australia, it was reported in June (Advertiser, 16 June, 1980) that the State's birth rate is that of 14.28 per 1,000 population.

These statistics show that people are generally living longer and, in

this regard women have a longer period of life after completing child rearing responsibilities. Children in South Australia constitute a declining proportion of the total population of that state.

Women in the Workforce

Another significant social change in Australia and one which should be mentioned here is the increasing number of women in the workforce. As such it represents a changing role for women in the Australian society. Fitzgerald, Musgrave and Petit (1976:3) wrote that this changing role is important because it is both an index and, in part, a cause of the changing place that the family has in contemporary societies. They further propose that the Christian ideal of life-long marriage and the privacy of the nuclear family, have both come under examination as necessarily being the best or the only way of organising family life. This proposition is an interesting one for the value of the extended family as contrasted with the nuclear family is often a matter of debate in social and educational circles. It is particularly important when considering the need to establish child care facilities in specific locations. The history of the development of Australian families shows, as Burns and Goodnow (1979) noted, that 'family support in terms of the extended family has not been available to many parents because they had migrated away from the family of origin'. Peculiar to Australia is the historic pattern of sheep droving, mining, isolation caused by distance and the need for men to move away from families to places of work thus forcing hardships upon family development and additional pressures upon women to cope.

As mentioned, the number of women moving into the (paid) workforce is increasing. In a survey of child-care conducted in 1977 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 43.9% of persons (mostly women) responsible for children under the age of twelve years were participating in the workforce.

In common with other Western societies, a rising divorce rate and ex-nuptial birth rate has resulted in an increased number of single parent families. Between 7% and 8% of South Australian children live in single parent families. Such families tend to be concentrated in the larger

towns and cities. The Henderson Report on Poverty in Australia (1975) commented that such families and the children within them are at a higher risk of poverty and their standard of living is lower than higher income wage earners.

Education in Australia

The administration of school education in Australia is the responsibility of the several state governments. Since the mid 1950's the federal government, however, has intervened and supplied funding and other resources over and above that which state governments could not meet. While there are broad general guidelines of a policy nature which limit the states' right to disburse federal monies granted them for school education, there is little direct involvement by the federal government in the formation of states' educational policies and practices.

The provision of pre-schooling is quite separate from primary and secondary schooling. All states have a system of pre-schooling though the systems are not uniform in kind nor access. During the period 1973-76 the federal government of the day had a policy of providing free pre-schooling for all children in Australia for the year prior to their entry into formal schooling. The present federal government does not articulate such a policy. However, financial support at an agreed-upon level is given all states to implement their own individual policy of pre-schooling. Most, but not all states, have a policy of free pre-school education and are, with few exceptions, presently attempting to meet demands by families of pre-school education.

The Australian education system has evolved from those of Britain and the United States of America in approaches adopted and philosophies espoused. However, there is great variation in the school organisation, emphases and mode of teaching from school to school and state to state within Australia. Whilst the term early childhood education encompasses the age range of birth to 8 years in the Australian educational scene it refers generally to pre-schooling. Compulsory schooling begins at 6 years of age and is mandatory until a child reaches the age of 15. Most children, however, commence formal schooling at 5 years of age.

It is against this background that parent/teacher expectations of pre-school and early schooling are to be examined.

PART II PARENT/TEACHER EXPECTATION OF PRE-SCHOOL AND EARLY SCHOOLING

The research which is presented looks specifically at parent/teacher expectations of pre-school and schooling.

Research in Australia in the area of parent/teacher expectations has been minimal. One intensive case study approach conducted by Fitzgerald, Musgrave and Petit (1976) on parent participation, indicated that the parents' main expectation of the school was that it should provide a solid foundation of basic academic skills. This study concentrated on parents and teachers of secondary age children and showed that there were differing expectations between parents and teachers particularly in the area of social development. Parents' expectations of the school as an agent of social development were lower than that of the teachers who rated this function much more highly. The study further stated (1976:45) that traditionally teachers' views of relationships with parents are one where the teacher is a knowledgeable expert and the parent is an ignorant layman. Co-operation with parents is to be encouraged but as Fitzgerald reported, the parents' role was not to criticise nor question but to support the expert, the teacher, in his efforts on behalf of the child.

The position is not so clear cut in the field of early childhood. A genuine attempt has been made to maintain a close relationship between school and parent. Daily contact between teachers and parents is encouraged and informal sharing of information about the home, the child and the school frequently takes place. At the pre-school level it has become increasingly important for early childhood teachers and parents to examine their expectations of what pre-schools should provide and what might be expected of the early years of formal schooling as children move into them.

The upsurge of parental and community interest in the activities and organisation of schooling has also had its effect upon pre-schooling although

historically the degree of parent involvement in pre-schooling has, perforce, been greater than for government funded, compulsory schooling. There have been changes in government policies which have mirrored the views of the society at large and at the same time has provided an incentive for change to take place. Prior to 1974 there was little federal funding given to pre-schools in Australia. Some state governments provided funding but this varied greatly from state to state. However, beginning in 1974 the federal government began to fund pre-schooling on the condition that the pre-schools diversified their services to families and not to see their role in the more narrow 'school-like' sense. Pre-schools were required also to be localised and community managed. In this sense they were to be administered by the families they served.

Such a policy to which considerable funding was tied, had an impact upon pre-schooling as both pre-school teachers, their system, administrators if they belonged to a system, and the parents as users, each singly and collectively were required to grapple with change. Obviously, for some the promotion of a community-managed early childhood centre called into question the aims and purposes of such a new concept of pre-schooling and how this new service might link with other community services.

It became increasingly evident that parental expectations and teacher expectations of what pre-schools should provide were not always congruent. Dissatisfaction can and often does begin at the pre-school level when parents do not understand or appreciate what they perceive to be the goals or objectives of the teachers' programme just as for some teachers there is a fear of what might be termed parental interference in their work.

In discussing parental involvement pre-school teachers often remark that they are under increasing pressure from parents to introduce formal skills, such as reading, into the pre-school programme. They comment that no amount of reassuring parents that what they are providing is more appropriate for children at their particular stage of development than the preconceived, formal and sometimes more abstract material desired by parents. Such conflicting concerns are symptomatic of the problems being encountered as parents and teachers become more actively involved in the education of children. Research in this fundamental aspect of human endeavour must be

geared towards assisting the user and the provider to a better understanding of the educative process.

One research project at this basic level, was devised for South Australia to ascertain the following:

1. to obtain some expressed opinions regarding the purposes of pre-school and early school from parents;

2. to obtain some expressed opinions regarding the purposes of pre-school and early school education from early childhood teachers who work in pre-schools/schools;

3. to analyse and compare the results of both groups.

It was hypothesised that parents' expectations would differ from those of early childhood teachers especially in relation to the relative importance of these purposes.

The study comprised two parts. First, 125 parents and 25 teachers were interviewed in a semi-structured manner. A draft questionnaire on the purposes of pre-school and early schooling formed the basis for discussion.

Following this an analysis of these interviews was conducted and as a result a questionnaire was devised incorporating key phrases obtained from the people interviewed. The questionnaire was then piloted with another 20 groups of parents and teachers.

It was modified once again and then applied to a sample of:

10 parents randomly selected from 25 randomly selected pre-schools in metropolitan Adelaide.

Total of 250 parents and 50 early childhood teachers from these pre-schools.

The sample surveyed represented 10% of all government controlled pre-schools in South Australia. The questionnaire was designed for both

parents and teachers. Of necessity the language used in the questionnaire was simplified and educational jargon was deliberately avoided. The questionnaire was translated into the main language groupings of Italian and Greek so that main ethnic groups in addition to English speakers could participate. The response of teachers and parents was very good. 94% of the teachers selected responded and 90% of the parents selected responded. The responses were computerised and prepared for analysis.

The questionnaire was divided into three areas:

a) the most important purposes for sending a child to pre-school;

b) the most important skills needed by children for functioning effectively when they are adults;

c) the most important purposes of pre-school in relation to the role of parents.

In this paper, I will deal only with a) and b) above.

In the first section the purposes of sending a child to pre-school were grouped in seven broad categories and parents/teachers were asked to rank the purposes on a 5 point scale from irrelevant to very important:

(i) To prepare the child for school (i.e. skill development);

(ii) To aid the child's physical growth;

(iii) To help the child's social and emotional growth (self-concept development);

(iv) To help the child to learn;

(v) To help the child's moral growth;

(vi) To help the child's ability to care for the environment;

(vii) To help the child adjust to school (i.e. his/her adjustment).

Skill development as preparation for school was deliberately separated from social adjustment as teachers believed that skill development was generally viewed separately by parents.

The second section of the questionnaire required parents and teachers to look towards the future in relation to young children and rank what they perceived to be the most important skills needed by children when they become adults. The skills were:

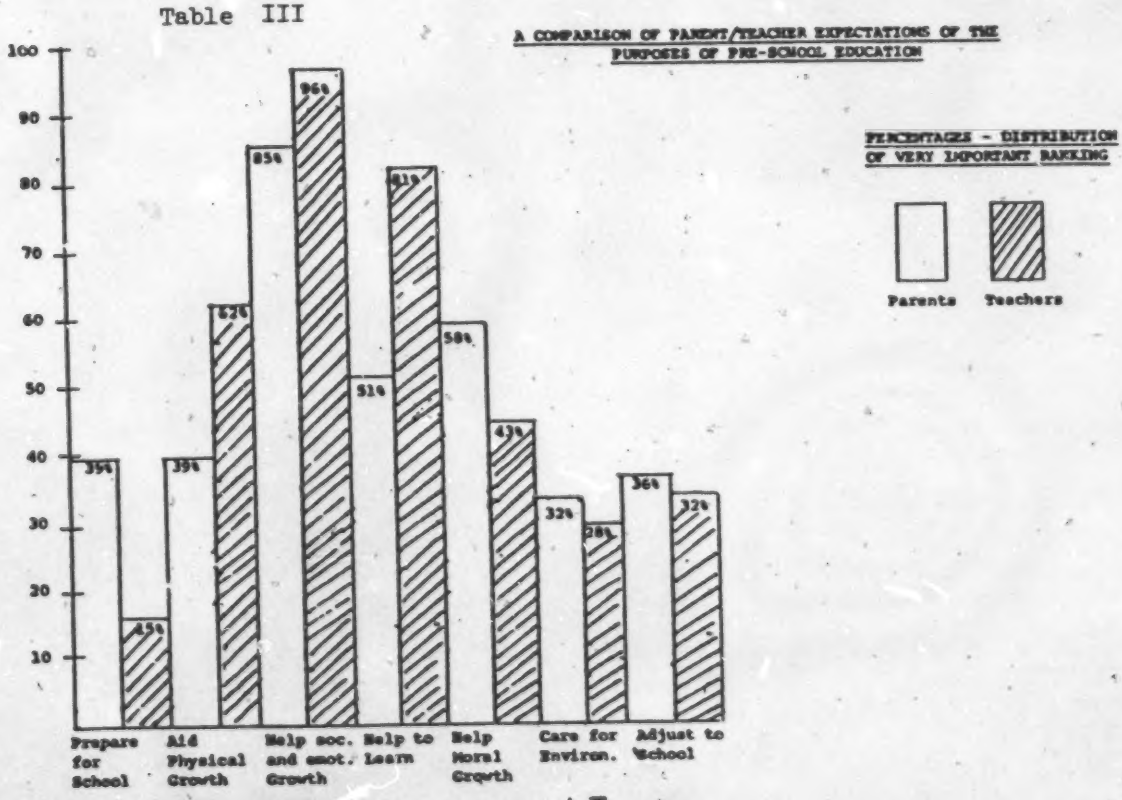
Ability to talk well (communicate);
Ability to read well;
Ability to think clearly;
Ability to use mathematical skills;
Ability to use leisure time, e.g. hobbies;
Ability to get on with other people;
Ability to fit into new situations;
Ability to care for other people;
Ability to care for the physical environment, e.g. conservation;
Ability to complete a task.

Analysis of the Data

The data were analysed to show how both groups rated the purposes of pre-school education and the skills they perceived children needing in the future.

Depicted in graph form on a percentage and mean distribution the results are as follows:

Table III



When the results are averaged and a mean computed the following results are seen.

Table IV A COMPARISON OF PARENT/TEACHER EXPECTATIONS OF THE PURPOSES OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

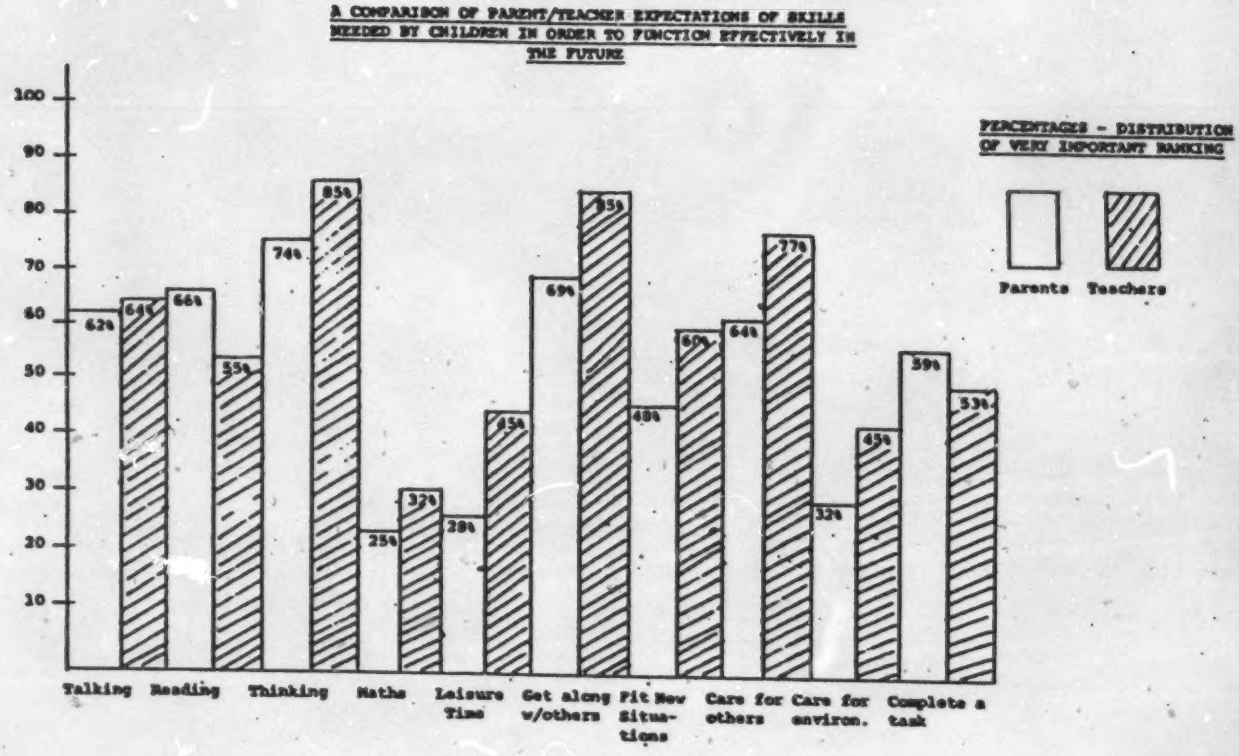
	Parent Response		Teacher Response	
	Mean	S.Dev.	Mean	S.Dev.
1. Prepare child for school (skill development)	4.14	0.86	3.77	0.70
2. Help the child to learn	4.40	0.70	4.83	0.38
3. Aid physical growth	4.23	0.76	4.60	0.54
4. Help moral growth	4.46	0.73	4.37	0.61
5. Help social, emotional, self growth	4.85	0.39	4.96	0.20
6. To help the child learn to care for the environment	4.07	0.82	4.20	0.58
7. Help the child adjust to school	4.12	0.81	4.04	0.82

Total number of parent responses = 226
Total number of teacher responses = 47

The purposes in order of priority are:

Parents	Teachers
1. Aid social/emotional/self growth	1. Aid social/emotional, self growth
2. Help moral growth	2. Help the child to learn
3. Help the child to learn	3. Aid physical growth
4. Aid physical growth	4. Help moral growth
5. Prepare the child for school (skill development)	5. Care for the environment
6. Adjustment to school	6. Adjustment to school
7. Care for the environment	7. Prepare child for school (skill development)

Table V



A comparison of parent/teacher expectations of the skills needed by children in order to function effectively in the future is depicted in Table V. This table shows the percentage distribution of very important ranking.

Table VI shows mean computation of skills needed.

Table VI

A COMPARISON OF PARENT/TEACHER EXPECTATIONS OF THE SKILLS NEEDED BY CHILDREN IN ORDER TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IN THE FUTURE

	Parent Response		Teacher Response	
	Mean	S.Dev.	Mean	S.Dev.
1. Ability to talk well (communicate)	4.60	0.53	4.55	0.65
2. Ability to read well	4.64	0.52	4.55	0.50
3. Ability to think clearly	4.74	0.45	4.75	0.36
4. Ability to use mathematical skills	4.08	0.65	4.15	0.69
5. Ability to use leisure time (creativity)	4.11	0.75	4.38	0.61
6. Ability to get on with other people	4.68	0.49	4.85	0.36
7. Ability to care for other people	4.61	0.55	4.77	0.43
8. Ability to fit into new situations	4.43	0.59	4.60	0.50
9. Ability to care for the environment (conservation)	4.18	0.68	4.40	0.58
10. Ability to complete task	4.54	0.60	4.52	0.55

Total number of parent responses = 226

Total number of teacher responses = 47

The priority order of skills is as follows:

Parents	Teachers
1. Ability to think clearly	(1. Ability to think clearly
2. Ability to get on with other people	(1. Ability to get on with other people
3. Ability to read well	2. Ability to care for other people
4. Ability to talk well	3. Ability to fit into new situations
5. Ability to care for other people	(4. Ability to talk well
6. Ability to fit into new situations	(4. Ability to read well
7. Ability to complete a task	5. Ability to complete a task
8. Ability to care for the environment	6. Ability to care for the environment
9. Ability to use leisure time	7. Ability to use leisure time
10. Ability to use mathematical skills	8. Ability to use mathematical skills

Implications of the findings of the study

Some of the results were unexpected. It was surprising to find that both teachers and parents rated the purpose 'social, emotional, self-development' as the most important purpose. Such a result is encouraging for the child's social-emotional-self-growth is surely of prime importance in any pre-school programme. The surprising element is the parent response. One might have expected parents to consider other purposes to be more important especially as many pre-school teachers believe there to be a lack of understanding by parents of the value of those aspects of their programme which fosters the child's social, emotional and self-development. Perhaps teachers are underrating the perceptions of parents.

The purpose 'helping the child to learn' is one where expectations varied. Whilst teachers would be more knowledgeable of the breadth of learning which occurs in that part of the pre-schools' programme which fosters socialisation, parents on the other hand could not be expected to appreciate such breadth and therefore be cognizant of the potential for learning in the activities planned for children. This disparity suggests that more attention needs to be given by teachers when they interact with parents. Skill preparation for school is another area where expectations varied. Early childhood teachers have traditionally rejected the idea that the purpose of pre-school is to prepare the child for school. This view seems to be reinforced even yet. Whilst it is educationally unsound to implement a primary school curriculum in pre-schools it is to be expected that children, towards the end of their pre-school experience, need to develop strategies which will help them adjust to the more formal requirements of schooling.

In the study, parents from the non-English speaking migrant groups placed a higher priority on preparation for school in terms of skill development than did the rest of the sample. When interviewed, migrants emphasised their concern for their children's academic future and expressed the hope that pre-school should be the starting place for formal learning, and that it would not be delayed until primary

schooling. They stated the belief that their children would have an easier path in life if well-equipped academically. They viewed the socialisation aspect of education as far less important. It may well be that the hardship encountered by immigrants as they settle into a new country makes them more alert to the problems their children will face if they lack essential academic skills.

When looking at the implications of the skill section of the study, one of the most interesting and unexpected findings was that the following were ranked lowest by both parents and teachers:

- ability to care for the environment
- ability to use mathematical skills
- ability to use leisure time.

All of these findings have relevance to the theme of this conference. They are the areas which appear to be least valued by parents and teachers of young children living in Australia in 1980.

Although social conditions in the world have changed rapidly few people would predict that with increasingly advancing use of technology, leisure time would decrease. If the present unemployment pattern in Australia continues, many children who are aged four, five and six in 1980, may, as adults, work in part-time employment, be unemployed for considerable periods of time, or may even not be employed at all. Most parents have high expectations for their children and rightly want the best for them. However, if the future means fewer hours of so-called 'paid employment' then creative and useful commitment of leisure time would seem an important factor in the preparation of young people for their future.

A large proportion of the respondents in both groups, parents and teachers, were women, and as such perhaps reflect a cultural trait in Australia where women traditionally have felt less adequate than men in coping with mathematics. It is well documented that fewer girls in secondary and tertiary education elect to study mathematics. Atweh (1980) wrote that the low rate of participation of girls and women in the study of mathematics beyond the levels when the subject ceases to be obligatory is a concern to the education community at large both in Australia and

In examining the question of future employment, more and more professions require trainees to have skill in mathematics. This is particularly significant for girls who may be closing their job options if they lack mathematical skills. As noted earlier in the paper more women than ever are involved in the workforce. Atweh (1980) proposes that the increased female representation in the workforce is not matched by an increased female representation in higher mathematics or mathematics related subjects. The implications of this could be crucial. If devaluing of mathematics begins at the pre-school level then the existing problem of mathematics avoidance is likely to be reinforced.

Another implication of this finding may be for teachers and parents to examine the complementary nature of learning as exemplified in the interrelationship between cognition, language, science and mathematical learning.

Although the use of computers has, and in the future will, further minimise some of the drudgery attached to computation, an hierarchy of skills is integrated when a child or adult uses a computer effectively. He has to be aware of what he is doing and the process behind his actions if he is to function intelligently. The potential for mathematical learning is as much present in the home as it is in pre-schools and schools. Direct experience, discovery and experimentation are vital. There is sometimes a tendency to hurry the child forward from a concrete observational or pictorial stage to one where numbers are manipulated abstractly on paper. We should not reduce the desire for natural experimentation by children, nor force them on before they are ready. Returning again to the secondary school level, teachers often report the inability of children to solve mathematical problems. The testing of mathematical hypothesis begins very early in life in a highly natural way and this can be enhanced by good pre-schooling. The question is, are we maximising this skill in later life?

A matter of further concern is that both teachers and parents rated caring for the environment of lesser value than other purposes. One would not expect 4, 5 and 6 year olds to be avid conservationists, however, Australia's problems of pollution, of increasingly scarce natural resources, of drought and of destruction of the natural environment, are very real.

In a recent Australian publication on conservation, Bristow (1979) proposed that few people are worried about protecting the environment for they are more concerned with personal possessions, money and trendy trivia which promise happiness. She notes that Aboriginal people lived thoughout Australia scarcely changing or destroying the environment, believing that every living thing had its purpose and that people belonged to the land, not vice-versa. Whilst it would be absurd to suggest that modern people should live in a primitive way, perhaps a more realistic appraisal of what caring for the environment means is needed.

The question then is posed: at what age should teaching of care for the environment begin? Is the pre-school level too early?

In attempting to relate these research findings to some of the patterns of changing Australian society mentioned earlier in this paper, it is noted that care for others was rated highly by both teachers and parents. As there is an increasingly ageing population, such a finding is significant. The Royal Commission Report on Human Relationships (1977:22) commented on attitudes towards aged people as follows:

> In many ways our attitudes to the aged are similar to other members of our society such as women who stay at home and handicapped people. Because so many of our values are predicted upon a person's worth in economic terms, we tend to denigrate and reject all those who are not economically productive. We project a stereotype of dependency upon them, which in turn becomes self-fulfilling. Yet often our attitudes to the aged are not based upon reality or experience, but upon this process of stereotyping and conditioning.

The report also proposed that by cutting off contact with the aged, we are deprived of their knowledge and experience. Contact with the aged would seem to be particularly important as with increasingly diminishing family size children are often limited in the number of relationships they can form. Margaret Mead (1973) said, the nuclear family has been left desperately autonomous in their isolation; that children need the security of many adults, including the aged, who may, for example, 'be able to take them fishing and show them the stars'.

Children benefit from the opportunities to form positive contact with significant others. In a mutually supporting relationship, they learn the meaning of caring for others.

CONCLUSION

Parental standards and expectations are too important to ignore. Ideally the expectations of parents and teachers should be congruent or at least complementary. It is well recognised that parents have a most important function in the education of their children. The effectiveness of any early childhood programme is contingent upon the support and acceptance of the parents just as the educational value of the home can be effectively supported by a soundly based early childhood programme.

Many educators have argued forcefully for strong involvement of parents in early childhood programmes and in later schooling. As Midwinter (1975) stated, to deny parents a major share in the control of one of the nation's largest industries, and one that affects, at some stage the entire population, would be as foolish as it would be criminal.

The role of the professional in meeting parents' expectations on one hand and providing guidance on another, is a complex one. The teacher, as a professional must meet the parent beyond the half-way mark. He/she cannot be cloaked in professional mystique but must be prepared to view things as well from the parents' perspective. Mutual understanding, respect and support are vital for both parents and teachers.

What strategies then, should teachers adopt in their work with parents? First, they must find out what the parents' expectations are. They must accept the views of parents and consider them. Where possible, they must aim to involve parents in decision making roles. As Watt (1977) proposed, if parents are given responsibility within a partnership which is based on equality, they can come to see their own relationships with teachers in a new light.

It has long been argued in early childhood education that a sound relationship between the teacher and child is crucial to any good learning situation. I would propose that the triad relationship of parents/

teacher/child is just as critical to the success of any programme.

In some of our early childhood programmes in Australia, early childhood teachers have come under increasing administrative pressure as their jobs have become more complex. They feel torn between dividing their time between working with children and involvement with families. Some also experience uncertainty in identifying priorities of balance between these two areas of their work and in relating these priorities to the curriculum they devise for their children.

In a world which is increasingly under pressure, one of our most precious commodities, time, is becoming increasingly precious. Fragmentation and division within the curriculum may occur when time is in short supply. Imaginative play, engrossment in activities, indeed transfer of learning may be lost when 'tidy up' time is applied rigidly in pre-school programmes.

In one of the Australian pre-school publications called Links, a pre-school officer reported recently the following incident. As she sat with a small child on a tractor tyre, the child said:

> 'We're sitting side saddle.
> You know, ladies used to ride horses that way in the olden days.'
>
> 'Who tells you about olden days?' the adult inquired.
>
> 'Mick, Grandfather Mick. He talks and talks about olden days and my brother and I play olden days in our cubby house.'
>
> 'Do you play olden days at pre-school?' the adult inquired again.
>
> 'No', replied the child.
>
> 'No -one knows about them here, and there's not enough time.'

It is unfortunate if in our zeal to provide the right curriculum for children we become too anxious, too time oriented, too concerned with immediate results to allow children time to be four, five, six, seven or eight year olds.

Preparation and planning for the future are certainly too important to neglect or negate but we must always remember that the young child is forever struggling to find consistency, and to make sense of his world now, not with regard to some future time. In our anxiety to provide a better world for our young, we must not lose sight of the fact that society's pressures rebound on our children.

In the UNESCO World Survey of Pre-school Education by Mialaret (1978) it was stated that the situations in which a child find himself in the future, cannot be foreseen. This is true, however, irrespective of any chosen scenario for the future there are certain abilities and skills which a child will need. These are to be -

adaptable,
resourceful,
co-operative,
caring for others,
able to utilise leisure time in a resourceful and creative way,
aware and sensitive to an environment in which natural resources are becoming increasingly scarce,
able to solve problems,
able to work with others and to work alone,
able to make choices.

Preparation for the future does not mean cramming children with today's facts, figures and knowledge. Some knowledge is essential for children just as is the development of certain skills. These have to be learnt. What we must be careful with relates to the selection of what has to be learnt. What is relevant today most likely will be outmoded in 1990. If children have developed resilience, problem-solving skills and the ability to adapt to new and changing situations, then they are much better equipped to cope with the dynamic, modern, changing world which we, the teachers of 1980, cannot hold back.

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